

MAIL ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

LETTER

FROM

THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,

ON

The subject of establishing a mail on the Mississippi river, &c., &c.

DECEMBER 27, 1854.—Laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
December 26, 1854.

SIR: In answer to the resolution of the House of Representatives, adopted 13th instant, inquiring as to the establishment of a mail on the Mississippi river, under an act of Congress of 5th August, 1854, I have the honor to state that I invited proposals, by public advertisement, on the 29th August last, for conveying mails from Cairo, by Memphis, Napoleon, Vicksburg, Natchez, and Baton Rouge, to New Orleans and back, daily, in safe and suitable steamboats; and also from Rock Island, by Hampton, Port Byron, Cordova, Albany, Fulton, Savannah, Le Claire, Camanches, Lyons, Sabula, and Bellevue, to Galena, three times a week, in safe and suitable steamboats; and that Sherly, Roe & Sherlock bid \$300,000 per annum for the advertised service between Cairo and New Orleans, or \$325,000, and supply, in addition, three times a week the post offices at Columbus, Hickman, New Madrid, Ashport, Ocoila, Pecan Point, Randolph, Hickman's Bend, Fulton, Oldham, Napoleon, Victoria, Gaines's Landing, Columbia, Greenville, Point Worthington, Grand Lake, Princeton, Lake Providence, Talula, Pecan Grove, Millican's Bend, and Young's Point; or \$350,000, and supply these points, with those named in the advertisement, *daily*.

The only other bid was from A. J. Cain, at \$185,000 per annum for the advertised service. On the Rock Island and Galena route no bid was received in the prescribed time. The only bid was one received *after time* from J. R. Jones at \$50 the round trip, equal to \$7,800 per annum.

Separate routes were also advertised from Cairo, by Columbus, Hickman, New Madrid, Ashport, Hickman's Bend, Fulton, Ocoila,

Pecan Point, Randolph, and Oldham, to Memphis, and Vicksburg to Napoleon, three times a week.

On the former J. B. Hall bid \$30,000, A. J. Cain \$30,000, Samuel Tate \$40,000; on the latter no bid was received.

The boats now conveying mails between New Orleans and St. Louis supply Natchez, Vicksburg, Napoleon, Memphis, Hickman, and Cairo, daily, at \$20 per trip.

The Louisville boats touch at the same points, except Hickman, at \$25 per trip, six times a week, and all other offices of importance between Cairo and New Orleans twice a week, at \$100 per trip.

Thus the whole cost during the year ending 30th June last for daily mails between New Orleans and Louisville, and New Orleans and St. Louis, including the offices named in the late act of Congress, and semi-weekly to the numerous other offices on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and special daily service a part of the year between Vicksburg and New Orleans, twice a week between Memphis and New Orleans, and six times a week between St. Louis and Keokuk, amounted to but \$112,485 per annum, while the lowest bid under the late advertisement was \$185,000 per annum for the limited service therein specified between Cairo and New Orleans.

Under such circumstances, the bids for the service contemplated by the late act of Congress, appeared to me so extravagant, as to induce me to defer any acceptance. And I felt further justified in such course by the fact that there are now no great mail lines in operation with which to connect the proposed one at Cairo, while the time is near at hand when such lines will be opened, rendering a steamboat route between Cairo and New Orleans of great importance, both for mails and travel. At present, its principal, if not only support, would be from this department; but after the completion of the Illinois Central railroad to Cairo, and of the Ohio and Mississippi road from the east to its point of intersection with the Illinois Central, such a large accumulation of trade and travel may be reasonably anticipated, as will go far towards sustaining a line of boats, and thus reduce the cost of mail service. These reasons were given in my last annual report.

Having thus failed to obtain acceptable bids, after duly advertising for them as directed by the act of Congress of 5th August, 1854, I am now engaged in efforts to put on the service by private contracts, as authorized by the provisions of the same act.

In answer to that part of the resolution of Congress inquiring what section or sections of said route have been contracted for, I have the honor to state that at the regular lettings of contracts on the 28th of April last, the bid of George A. Brinkley was accepted at \$10,000 a year, to convey mails from Napoleon to Memphis twice a week. This service commenced 1st July last. The accepted bidder being dead, a contract was ordered the 16th inst. with R. C. Brinkley at same pay.

On the 26th July, 1854, a contract was ordered with W. Porterfield, at \$100 per trip, for service twice a week between Vicksburg and Napoleon, which commenced on the 18th August, 1854. No contract has been executed.

By advertisement of the 9th January, 1854, proposals were invited

for conveying mails from Vicksburg, Miss., by Warrenton, Grand Gulf, St. Josephs, La., Rodney, Miss., Water Proof, La., Natchez, Miss., Fort Adams, Red River Landing, La., St. Francisville, Waterloo, Hermitage, Port Hudson, Lobdel's Store, Baton Rouge, Bruly Landing, Manchac, Plaquemine, Iberville, Bayou Goula, New River, Donaldsonville, Tureaud, Convent, Bonnet Carre, Edgar's, Taylor's, and La Branche's Landing, to New Orleans, 397 miles and back, six times a week from October 1st to July 1st, and three times a week the residue of the year.

The only bid received under this advertisement was from Wm. C. Templeton, at \$115,000 per annum.

On the 7th of June last a route was advertised from St. Francisville, by Waterloo, Hermitage, Port Hudson, Lobdel's Store, Baton Rouge, Bruly Landing, Manchac, Plaquemine, Iberville, Bayou Goula, New River, Donaldsonville, Tureaud, Convent, Edgar's, Bonnet Carre, Taylor's, and Logan's Landing, to New Orleans and back, daily, on which the following bids were received, viz:

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| Wm. C. Templeton..... | \$45,000 |
| Andrew McKinly..... | 49,800 |
| John Cain..... | 55,000 |
| Colton & Landry..... | 85,000 |

After careful consideration I determined not to put in operation the whole of the advertised service, either from Vicksburg or St. Francisville to New Orleans, but to provide for a tri-weekly mail the year round between Vicksburg and St. Francisville, and six times a week for nine months between New Orleans and St. Francisville, embracing the business season, and three times the residue of the year.

The amount of compensation for this service was adjusted by a *pro rata* reduction of Captain Templeton's bid of \$115,000 on the Vicksburg and New Orleans route, which had been advertised, as above stated, for six trips nine months and three trips three months of the year, he being the only bidder on that route, and the lowest on the one from St. Francisville to New Orleans. Considering the sum thus arrived at still too high, I offered \$75,000; which offer being accepted by Captain Templeton, a contract was ordered accordingly, on the 10th day of August last, for conveying mails from New Orleans to Vicksburg, three times a week from 1st July to 1st October, with three additional weekly trips to St. Francisville and back from 1st October to 1st July, each year; service to commence on 1st November.

Subsequently Captain Templeton reported that he had met with unforeseen and unavoidable difficulties in procuring the requisite boats to commence service as agreed upon, and asked an extension of time until 1st January next. Having reasons to believe his statements as to the obstacles thrown in his way, and confiding in his assurances that he would be able to overcome them all by the time stated, the desired extension was allowed, and it is expected that he will commence service accordingly on the 1st of January next. Should he fail to do so, immediate steps will be taken to procure another contractor.

His bids above referred to were received in due time and duly guaranteed according to law, so that they were clearly entitled to consider-

ation in preference to all others on the same routes. He has not executed a contract, but is fully bound by his bid, and his guarantors are likewise responsible.

At present the service is performed by the trip, as heretofore.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, &c.,

JAMES CAMPBELL,

Postmaster General.

Hon. LINN BOYD,

Speaker House of Representatives.